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## **Build America's Library Act**

The \$5 billion Build America's Library Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate on January 28 and then in the House of Representatives on March 3. However, specific funding for it was not included in the first draft of the American Jobs Plan now in debate. This is what the American Library Association has to say about the Act's purpose.

"At the federal level, Congress has not provided dedicated funding for library facilities since 1997. Nationally, public libraries have billions of dollars in assessed facility needs, including more than \$1.5 billion of needs in **New York**, more than \$500 million of needs in **Illinois**, and more than \$250 million of needs for libraries in **Washington's rural distressed counties**.

"The Build America's Library Act would begin to address decades of underinvestment by providing funds to repair and construct modern library facilities in underserved and disadvantaged communities. Specifically, funding could be used for:

- Constructing, renovating, modernizing, or retrofitting library facilities, including by enhancing facilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and vulnerability to natural disasters. Investing in library infrastructure projects to improve internet access and connectivity.
- Reducing or eliminating the presence of potential hazards to library staff and patrons, including toxic substances, lead, mold, mildew, and unsafe drinking water. Making library facilities more accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities.
- Improving library facilities for the purposes of supporting place-based services or community-based partnerships that provide library patrons with access to educational, workforce, behavioral health, mental health, and social services."

The WLN and its member libraries have been able to do upgrades to facilities under other types of grants in recent years (see archive at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org>), including a countywide upgrade of shared digital capacity with conversion to a high-speed glass-fiber network, all funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Allegheny Foundation, and others. Most recently, the WLN also separately upgraded Wi-Fi capacity at its member libraries, enhancing signal for users accessing 24/7 from outside of library buildings, with funding from the COVID-19 CARES Act.

Murrysville Community Library, on its own several years ago, modernized and expanded its Children's Room, aided by a 1:1 matched Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund grant. Greensburg/Hempfield Area Library is currently upgrading its public library under a 2020 Keystone grant. Keystone grant limits have varied annually from \$50,000 to \$750,000.

In 2021, in response to COVID-19, Murrysville Community Library upgraded its HVAC system, although without the benefit of a grant; rapid response was prioritized. Other WLN libraries as a group are now seeking funding to do the same. So, libraries have

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challenges not only to grow operating funds year over year, but also to upgrade facilities through capital projects. We encourage you, when you have the opportunity, to support the Build America's Library Act. It is important!

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